

# **Governor Murkowski's Surface Transportation Initiative**

## **"Meeting the Transportation Needs of Alaskans"**

### **Fact Sheet: Community Transportation Package**

Governor Frank Murkowski is proposing a \$108 million package of community transportation projects for the Legislature's consideration, which he proposes to be paid for using state dollars. There are two basic reasons why we want to use state funds instead of federal funds: first, projects eligible for federal funding outpace the available funds by 50 to 1; and second, the federal process requires such a long-term timeline that many of the projects we are proposing could not be built in a timely manner.

In addition, between 1995 and 2002, \$120 million more than what was required was spent on the TRAAK (Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska) program, which builds trails and other amenities. Much of this funding could have been used to address traffic congestion.

Beginning in 2003, the source of STIP (Statewide Transportation Improvement Program) federal funds experienced a downturn in funding that has caused a large number of ongoing projects to be delayed by two or more years. In fact, the 2-year decline in federal funding is believed to be the first such decline since statehood. This shortfall in expected funding has been compounded by the mandate from the federal reviewers that the state must address "time trap" projects; such projects were begun 10 or more years ago and are not yet completed. Thus the time trap issue has unavoidably diverted some federal funds to projects that may not be today's highest priorities.

Aside from the recent downturn in the level of federal funds, is the issue of competing priorities for a finite source of funds. The STIP is over subscribed by as much as 50:1. That is, for every project that makes it into the STIP there are 49 projects that cannot be funded! Thus the process of creating the STIP inevitably leads to many sound and deserving projects being delayed. There simply are not enough funds to go around.

A significant advantage of a state-funded element to transportation improvements is that it is faster than the federal design, environmental and right-of-way process. The federal rulebook leads to long project timelines, sometimes taking nearly a decade from beginning to end. When a project has significant issues to overcome, the use of state dollars can significantly accelerate a project and lead to transportation improvements in a much shorter time frame.

Thus not using state dollars for these proposed capital projects slows the rate of project accomplishment for all of the reasons noted above. There are not enough funds for the projects that have been identified, and the federal process is not time efficient in delivering complex projects for reasons outside the state's control.

With many and varied needs such as urban congestion, safety, rehabilitation, growing communities, resource development and gas pipeline construction simultaneously seeking funds,

the federal STIP is inadequate. Only by bringing greater financial resources can these needs be addressed.

Virtually every state but Alaska has a significant state-funded transportation program in addition to its federal program. And now the trend is to seek even larger state funding sources, such as Oregon's bonding for statewide bridge rehabilitation of nearly \$1 billion, Washington state, which is looking at more than \$10 billion just for Seattle-area mega projects, and the Texas toll initiative for \$183 billion.

Alaska will never come to grips with the imbalance between the many worthy needs and available funds unless we enlarge the funds available to tackle the most urgent issues.

The projects Governor Murkowski has included in this Community Transportation Package are the following:

Anchorage – Midtown congestion and truck route improvements - \$26 million. This multiple-project initiative will identify and construct the most congestion-relieving projects in east and midtown Anchorage. It includes these projects:

- Tudor-Bragaw intersection improvements \$7 million. This project would construct additional auxiliary turn lanes at the intersection of Tudor Road and Bragaw Street. The south edge of Tudor Road would be shifted 12 feet further south to provide an additional east and westbound left turn lane on Tudor Road. The west edge of Bragaw Street would be shifted 12 feet further west to provide an additional southbound through and right turn lane. The east edge of Bragaw Street would be shifted 12 feet further east to provide a northbound right turn lane. Use of state funds would speed project delivery, as there are inadequate STIP funds to apply to the project.
- Dowling Road east extension - \$19 million. The Dowling Road extension portion of the project creates an important truck bypass route that supports the gas pipeline construction. It involves reconstructing 2,100 feet of Dowling Road between Lake Otis Parkway and Norm Street to a five-lane urban arterial standard and a 3,200-foot extension to the new Abbott Loop Road (Bragaw Street) constructed to a four-lane rural arterial standard with a depressed median. This project has significant environmental and permitting issues that are more complex and slower to overcome if federal funds are used. Use of state funds would speed the project delivery significantly and save over \$5 million as compared to a federally funded project.

Anchorage – Glenn Highway congestion and truck corridor improvements - \$30.5 million. This project would expedite construction of the Glenn Highway-Bragaw Street interchange to resolve one of the most severe traffic bottlenecks in south central. As this route is a major truck route between the Port of Anchorage and points to the north and east, this improvement will also serve in the ramp-up for construction of the natural gas pipeline. The Glenn Highway would be constructed with six lanes at a lower elevation than today. Bragaw Street would bridge over the Glenn Highway. The eastbound ramps would be constructed in a tight diamond configuration. The westbound on-ramp would be a tight loop in the northeast quadrant, meeting the westbound off-ramp at a signalized intersection on the east side of Bragaw Street. This intersection would ultimately be four-legged when a two-lane frontage road is constructed between Bragaw Street and Mountain View Drive. This is a very high priority project for both AMATS and the state, but the recent shortage of STIP funds has delayed it considerably. The use of state funds would shorten the development timeline and accelerate the construction date such that the project is ready for the gas pipeline.

Kenai Peninsula – Kalifornsky Beach Road rehabilitation - \$11 million. This project will expedite rehabilitation of the Kalifornsky Beach Road from its intersection with the Sterling Highway to the Kenai Bridge Access Road, a distance of 16 miles. This corridor provides

critical access for commerce between the City of Kenai and the southern Kenai Peninsula area, as well as the port of Homer.

Mat-Su – Congestion improvements - \$21 million. This group of projects is aimed at relieving traffic congestion between Palmer and Wasilla. It includes:

- Bogard Road extension (\$13 million). This project was begun as a non-federal project and applying federal funds now would require redoing much of the preliminary work.
- Palmer-Wasilla Highway expansion (\$6 million). This funding will complete the environmental process for a future construction project to address long-term congestion problems in this rapidly growing part of the borough. The state funds used to begin this project can be applied as the match funds thus reducing future state costs on the project while accelerating the project timeline.
- Multi-modal alternate Parks Highway and ARR corridor (\$2 million). This project will go to begin work with the Alaska Railroad on the environmental process for a new corridor through Wasilla. The state funds used to begin this project can be applied as the match funds thus reducing future state costs on the project while accelerating the project timeline.

Fairbanks – University Avenue/Geist/Johansen Intersection Improvements - \$3.5 million. Add right turn pockets at the intersection of University Avenue, Geist Road and Johansen Expressway to alleviate congestion at this intersection. This is one of the highest volume intersections in the Fairbanks area. Both north and southbound traffic along University Avenue backs up during peak hour at this intersection. The addition of right turn pockets will help relieve this congestion by removing vehicles from through lanes. Additional channelization of the receiving lanes for the dual left turn movement south to eastbound will be included. This may also include adjustments to provide dual lefts for north to westbound traffic.

Richardson Highway – Passing lanes additions - \$5 million. Construct additional vehicle passing lanes at selected locations on the Richardson Highway between MP 265 and 341 (Delta Junction to Eielson Air Force Base). The passing lanes will facilitate the passing of slow-moving military convoys, large trucks and RV traffic. Military traffic along this route is increasing due to the Stryker Brigade at Ft. Wainwright and the Missile Defense System at Ft. Greely. Heavy truck traffic as well as traffic in general is also expected to greatly increase during the gas pipeline construction. A significant safety hazard is created when drivers lose patience and attempt to pass slow-moving vehicles in unsafe passing areas.

Stampede Road – Improvements - MP 0 to 8 - \$5 million. This project would improve and resurface the historic Stampede Road from the Parks Highway to 8 Mile Lake, a route with growing tourism interest and traffic. The existing road is a narrow, two-lane road (22 feet wide) to 3.5 mile and was chip sealed in 2000. The remainder of the road is unimproved with very little gradable surfacing material. The road ends at an unimproved parking area at 8 Mile Lake, which serves as a trail head for the old Stampede Trail. The existing two-lane road will be improved and widened and surfaced with an asphalt surface treatment. This project also includes improvements to the parking area at 8 Mile Lake.

Cordova - Copper River Highway – Rehabilitation - \$4 million. This project entails pavement rehabilitation of the Copper River Highway between Cordova and the Cordova Airport. The original pavement was constructed in 1966. It has long exceeded its service life and is beyond the capabilities of routine maintenance. This project would improve the most critical sections of this route, important to commerce and tourism in Prince William Sound.

McCarthy Road – Major maintenance - \$2 million. Perform major maintenance on sections of the McCarthy Road. This project would improve the most critical sections of this route, important to tourism in south central Alaska and access to Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

The project will focus on the large mud holes and other major maintenance problem areas that are critically needed while a major improvement is pursued under a larger federal project. This roadway provides the only access to residents and visitors to the McCarthy and Kennicott area. This is a low-cost, interim improvement of selected areas of the road to improve traveler safety, reduce travel time and user costs, and greatly reduce maintenance costs.